

Furniture Masterpieces by Jacob Bachman

*EBENISTE SUISSE of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania,
His Son and His Grandson.*

By CARL W. DREPPERD

In the American Collector for October, 1945

For a considerable number of years, the discriminating antiques collectors of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, have noted the occasional appearance of a secretary desk, secretary bookcase, tea table, bow-front corner cupboard, or tall-case clock of very fine workmanship and quite unusual carving. These pieces were found only in and around Lancaster and, in the form of tall case clocks, seem to have been made in substantially the same style until at least 1820 and probably until 1830; these dates being fairly well certified by the years of activity of the makers of the clock movements in the fine cases. It was also noted that only clocks made in and around Lancaster were found in these marvelously fashioned cases.

Every piece of this mystery furniture had a certain something that bespoke a Philadelphia provenance, and yet, upon close scanning, and comparison with the fine Philadelphia pieces they seemed to resemble, differences stood out like the proverbial sore thumb. To the enthusiastic amateur collectors of the region, the Lancaster furniture seemed rather to have a closer relationship to the French of Louis XV and to the furniture of Provence.

Experts, self-styled, and by repute, were of course consulted. These, as experts will, first covered both flanks and rear with every synonym for "perhaps" and then made the frontal attack thus: "Undoubtedly Philadelphia. Perhaps by a now unknown maker, but again perhaps by Gostelow, Savery, or Randolph in their

earlier days, when they were a trifle less sure of their carving tools; a bit hesitant and less sophisticated."

They accounted for the presence of the furniture in and around Lancaster by explaining that many prominent Philadelphia families had emigrated to Lancaster during the American Revolution when the British occupied Philadelphia. These wealthy refugees probably carried their finer furniture with them. So, of course, the furniture was of a date between 1750 and 1770; Philadelphia Chippendale that positively could not have been made by a Pennsylvania-German cabinetmaker . . . the only kind that were working in Lancaster County.

This expertizing left Lancaster collectors quite cold. They resented the allegation that only German cabinetmakers were at work in the town and county largely because they knew of no German cabinetmakers other than "wood-butchers" who had worked there in the eighteenth century. Their own enthusiasm* remained undamped, in spite of the pronouncements of the experts.

Finally, three owners of examples of this mystery furniture decided to do something about it in terms of research. Plans were made for an excursion into Lancaster County history in order to expose the obscure facets: who made this furniture? when? and where? As is so often the case, when the effort was gotten under way, the whole story was discovered to have been wrapped up and waiting for exposure in all its amazing totality. There, in the printed and documented history of Lancaster County was enough data to redden the faces of experts and to confound the all too eloquent, glib, and superior neophytes who had passed judgment upon these unusual pieces of furniture.

This furniture is discovered to have been made by Jacob Bachman, born 1746, trained as an *ebeniste* in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland, who emigrated to Lampeter Township, Lancaster County, about 1766, and there began practicing the art he had learned in his native land. He carved and wrought in the manner of the *ebenistes Suisse*. His style was influenced by the fashions

* As one Lancaster collector remarked, "These experts are not devoid of enthusiasm, but it is not a collectors enthusiasm. I should put it down as something like the enthusiasm of the chief eunuch for the latest houri in the master's harem; the enthusiasm of the groom for the latest hunter in the boss' stable; the enthusiasm of the milliner for his latest creation on the head of one of his importnat patrons. Vicarious enthusiasm. Not spontaneous, vital, human enthusiasm."

of Louis XV (1715-1774) and the *haut monde* of Provence. He made furniture for the people of Strasburg, Lampeter Square, and Lancaster. His shop was then, prior to the building of the Lancaster-Philadelphia turnpike, on the King's Highway to Philadelphia. In 1771 Jacob Bachman married Mary Rohrer, whose ancestors had emigrated from Lorraine. They had nine children, one of whom, John Bachman, followed in his father's calling. This John Bachman, in turn, had a son, John, who also became a cabinetmaker. John II was born in 1798.

Jacob Bachman, in addition to making fine cabinet furniture, also made clock cases for his good friends and fellow Swiss, Christian and Daniel Forrer. Christian Forrer was born March, 1729, at Mett, in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland. He was apprenticed at an early age to Jean Francois Guillerat, mayor and clockmaker of Chetelat Bailliage of Delamont in the Grand Val. With his brother, Daniel, he emigrated to America in 1754. They possessed an estate in the District of Nidau which they sold, bringing 600 crowns with them by permission of the government and in 1757 obtaining the balance of the estate, 9733 pounds, less a 10 per cent emigration tax of 973 pounds. Christian Forrer was 17 when he arrived in America and Daniel was 20. These two men, C. & D. Forrer, were the only clockmakers of their line. Further details of the Forrer family, in America, may be found in *Christian Forrer, the Clockmaker, and His Descendants* compiled by Frank Bruen, of Bristol, Connecticut.

In the Flayderman sale, January 2, 3 and 4, 1930, a magnificent tall case clock (Lot No. 469), attributed to Gostelow, or Randolph of Philadelphia (because it bears outstanding characteristics of both these Philadelphia cabinetmakers), but bearing a movement by C. & D. Farrar, Lampeter, Pa., was offered as a masterpiece. That clock, now owned by Henry Ford and in his museum at Dearborn, had at the time of the Flayderman sale, a painted dial obviously made between 1870 and 1880. The lettering is of that period, and the chaptering (arrangement of hour numerals around the circular time track) was not in character with the attributed date.

In fact, a tall case clock of pre-Revolutionary vintage should have a brass dial, which the Flayderman clock probably had at one time. It is likely that, sometime after the Centennial Exposition

of 1876, when grandfather clocks with painted dials became quite the rage, this clock was re-dialed, and the name misspelled Farrar instead of Forrer, as it appears on the original brass dialed Forrer clocks. Sometime between the Flayderman sale and the placing of the clock in the Ford museum, the dial was repainted. The changes are quite obvious in the two illustrations: The equator line on the hemispheres are horizontal on the Flayderman dial, tilted in the newer, but more accurately delineated dial. The spandrels differ, the numerals on the newly painted time track are in keeping with the period of 1790-1830. The new lettering of the name unfortunately, continues the error, C. & D. Farrar, instead of Forrer.

Up to now this Forrer clock case has been considered either the work of Jacob, or John Bachman I. In light of what is known concerning the dates during which the Forrers worked, it could have been made only by Jacob Bachman.

In the Karolik Collection, now one of the proud and prized possessions of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, there is a walnut tea table with tilting top, cautiously catalogued as "Philadelphia School." The date attributed is 1750-1760. The wood is "Virginia" walnut; the modeling and carving is "unusual," as is the carving of the ball-like element in the baluster. Maxim Karolik, commenting on this table (pp. 363-4 of M. & M. Karolik Collection Catalogue) states that "he knows of no other tea table to be compared with it in terms of individual beauty, in spite of the fact that two other tea tables in the collection display richer carving and ornamentation."

This masterpiece was found in Lancaster County, and is by Jacob Bachman. Its history includes a record of movement from Lampeter to Lancaster, thence to Columbia, at which place it was purchased by Joe Kindig, Jr., of York, Pennsylvania. Its date, of course, is after 1760 and it may well be as late as 1780.

At various times it has been said that very little activity in the production of fine furniture went on during the War of the Revolution. This may have been very true of New York, Boston and Philadelphia, during the British occupation, and may also be true of all of those cities and towns within the Revolutionary battle zones. But Lancaster County was neither within the theatre of military action nor was Lancaster, save on one occasion ever

remotely threatened by occupation. On the other hand, Lancaster County enjoyed a tremendous boom during the American Revolution. Gun shops, clothing factories, button mills, breweries and other industries were kept going full blast. Lancaster was the arsenal of Pennsylvania and what went on there, as reported by such contemporary patriot diarists as Christopher Marshall, Thomas Paine, William Henry and others, is revealed as a succession of productive efforts, balls and jollifications, with excessively high prices current for all kinds of produce and merchandise.

The Swiss, French, Irish, Welsh and English farmers of Lancaster County sold wheat, corn, fodder and produce at unbelievably high prices. They had money. They spent money. Christopher Marshall deplored the gaiety in the midst of the national crisis and the prohibitive prices that obtained in Lancaster. The inns of Lancaster were crowded with members of the executive council of Pennsylvania, which maintained the capitol there in spite of the fact that the Continental Congress was meeting at York. Many members of Continental Congress made Lancaster their home because of the far better accommodations that were available, and commuted to and from York, attending the meetings of Congress once a week. Certain of the Philadelphians took houses in Lancaster and furnished them with the work of local artisans.

It is also significant that very few clock makers were active in Lancaster County before the American Revolution, among them being the two masters, Jacob Gorgas of Ephrata and Christian Forrer of Lampeter Square.

Jacob Bachman, from the data thus far assembled, worked at his trade during the Revolution, in what is now East Lampeter township. This township of Lancaster County, named for Lampeter in Wales, the site of Saint Davids College, was not settled by Germans as has been alleged. In 1880, Francis Gibbons, the Quaker historian of Lampeter, exploded the then already current Germanic-origins myth in respect of the settlers of Lancaster County. Gibbons remarked that these so-called Germans were not Germans, but Swiss, even though in old patents they are designated as "Palatines" or "Palatinates." Penn's officials were either careless or woefully remiss in the way they recorded emigrant entry. Any ship from London or Liverpool was a load of "English" and every ship from Amsterdam or Rotterdam was a load of Pala-

tinates. This in spite of the fact that scanning of the ships' lists reveals French, Swiss, Dutch, Swedes, Moravians, Walloons and even Polish and Slavic emigrants on board. Penn's internal agents, however, included the Swiss Mennonites with the French Huguenots among their peoples suspected of collaboration with the French during Braddock's famous, and disastrous, campaign!

Jacob Bachman's township was, in fact, peopled by Welsh and Cornishmen, Quakers, Swiss, French, Dutch, and by English Episcopalians. Germans, save as bond servants or redemptioners, were scarce. Further, the settlers in Lampeter were fairly well-to-do even though their wealth was in land, produce, and livestock, instead of gold.

Since the first clue to Jacob Bachman was gained from his clock cases, it may not be out of order here to list the clock makers of Lancaster County at work during the period Jacob Bachman, his son and grandson, John Bachman I and II, were producing fine clock cases.

Jacob Gorgas (Netherlands) made clocks near Ephrata, 1763-1798.

Joseph Bowman (Swiss), Strasburg, 1820-1850.

Thomas Burrowes (Irish), 1787-1810, Strasburg.

Martin Shreiner (Alsatian: Shrinieré), Lancaster, 1790-1830. Shreiner numbered his clocks. During the period 1790-1830 he made No's. 1 to 356.

George Ford (English), Lancaster, 1811-1840.

John Esterlie (Swiss), New Holland, 1812-1830.

Samuel Quest (English), Maytown, 1810-1820.

John Davis (Welsh), New Holland, 1802-1820.

Wilmer Atkinson, (English), Lancaster, 1750-1780. He was married to a daughter of Abraham LeRoy (Swiss) Clockmaker.

John Eberman (German), Lancaster, 1780-1820.

Henry L. Montandon (French), Lancaster, 1790-1802.

Anthony Wayne Baldwin (English), Lampeter Square, 1810-1840. John Bachman II made cases for Anthony Baldwin.

Christian Eby (Swiss), Manheim, 1830-1850.

Christian and Daniel Forrer (Swiss), Lampeter, 1754-1774. Jacob Bachman made cases for Christian Forrer.

John Heintzelman (Swiss), Manheim, 1785-1803.

Rudy Stoner (Swiss), Lancaster, c. 1750-1770.

Abraham LeRoy (Swiss), Lancaster, 1740-1770.

George Hoff (German), Lancaster, 1770-1815.

With the exception of Gorgas and Forrer, these clockmakers plied their trade by buying imported or domestic brass "blank" parts; and imported plates and dials. After 1776 there were no importations of brass dials, hence hand-painted iron dials came into use. Gorgas and Forrer clocks, made before 1776, are brass dialed.

The late David F. Magee in 1917 in the published papers of The Lancaster County Historical Society, had this to say about the Bachmans of Lampeter, Bachmanville and Strasburg: "John Bachman sold some clocks under his name although he was a cabinetmaker only. He was located at Bachmanville and made cases for Joseph Bowman of Strasburg and Anthony Baldwin of Lampeter. John Bachman's father, John Bachman, was born January 20, 1775. The John Bachman (here considered) was born September 24, 1798. His father and grandfather (Jacob Bachman) were also cabinetmakers. Jacob Bachman was born in Switzerland in 1746, came to America as a young man and, in 1771, was married to Mary Rohrer."

In pointing out three generations of cabinetmakers named Bachman, Mr. Magee unfolded one phase of the Bachman puzzle as related to clock cases. All three of these cabinetmakers made fine clock cases. Yet only John Sr. and John Jr. could have made cases for Anthony Baldwin, who made clocks 1810-1840 and for Joseph Bowman who made clocks in 1820-1850. Only Jacob Bachman could have made cases for Christian and Daniel Forrer, who made clocks 1754-1774.

Just how any expert, or even amateur, could mistake a Bachman piece for a Philadelphia piece in the high style of the Quaker city school of eighteenth century cabinetmakers must remain something of a mystery. If the reader will look closely at the Bachman highboy, and the Philadelphia highboy, pp. 135 and 138, the differences should hit one squarely between the eyes. The Philadelphia piece has suavity; it literally flaunts its elegance, in line, form, and quality of carving. The carving itself is deeper, and more daringly done. The Philadelphia piece is the sort of furniture most London and Paris cabinetmakers envied. The Bachman piece represents what they most frequently achieved. Hence the writer's considered opinion, all dissenting experts opinions to the contrary, is just this: Jacob Bachman was a Swiss village-

trained cabinetmaker who had a good master, and so did good work in good styles. He came to America, settled in Lancaster County, and started making furniture to order for custom that was moderately or fairly well-to-do. He did his best to make what was then the most stylish furniture in America . . . Philadelphia style furniture. He fell considerably short of duplicating the Philadelphia work but, because he was basically a well-trained workman, he made superlatively good furniture. He knew the basic designs used on Philadelphia work and had them from their French sources. It is likely the Philadelphia cabinetmakers also drew from the same sources, perhaps from Paris and Provence direct, and certainly not filtered through Switzerland. Personally, I prefer the Bachman secretary shown on page 134 to more ornate ones. Some are "near-Philadelphia" but "misses" just the same. This Bachman secretary makes no pretence at being "near" anything and it isn't. It is right on the beam . . . a grand piece of early Federal cabinetmaking by an American born, Lancaster County, cabinetmaker who did his growing up during the Revolution. As to the decorative elements used by the Bachmans, father, son and grandson, they appear to be in the French style of Louis XV, refinements of the *baroque* and the *rococo*. But in saying that, we are disposed also to say "so what?" What should interest the collector, director, and curator in this Bachman story is the fact that good furniture was made in the back country; in that "pleasant land behind" Philadelphia, as Rudyard Kipling called it. As to the occasional attribution of Bachman furniture to Gostelow, Savery, Randolph, or "Philadelphia School," we are disposed to put that down as either wishful thinking (or even wishful thinking to some purpose) and to a lazy habit of mind that would work something like this: "it looks like Philadelphia, therefore it must be Philadelphia, because it couldn't have been made anywhere else." That's just about the most dangerous kind of thinking we can do about anything American. We are continually overlooking the fact that in this country the artisans had courage, freedom and imagination. They exercised all three of these assets. And, in the eighteenth century, America was about the only place on earth where all the artisans had such assets of mind and could use them.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The foregoing is by no means all of the Amazing Story of the Bachman line of cabinetmakers of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. There is more to come; more now being compiled by S. E. Dyke, Esq., of Lancaster. The Bachman cabinetmaking enterprise which started in 1766 remained in continuous operation until the first decade of the twentieth century. Always they were custom cabinetmakers, and always they worked in a style from 50 to 75 years "behind the times." Which is to say they were reproducing a sort of Chippendale when Empire was the fashion, and Sheraton and Directoire when what is now called "Victorian" was the fashion. Sheraton and Hepplewhite slope-fall desks were made by the Bachmans as late as 1850. A Sheraton desk, purchased from the Hershey family about 1907 was repaired by a Bachman at Strasburg. He said, upon seeing the piece he was to repair "Why my Grandfather made this desk for Hershey's wife's grandmother!"

—*American Collector.*

Lancaster Soldier Sounded Taps At Funeral of General Patton

Sergeant Amos F. Martin, son of Mr. and Mrs. Amos G. Martin, 825 Reservoir Street, sounded "taps" over the grave of General George S. Patton, Jr., at the funeral in Luxembourg on Monday, December 24, 1945.

Sergeant Martin, who has been in the service about three years, is with the 61st Army Ground Forces Band, Third Army Headquarters, Bad Tolv, Germany.

He has been overseas almost a year, and was formerly associated with a Lancaster orchestra.